

THE ANALYSIS OF MASCULINITY IN ADVERTISING: A QUALITATIVE STUDY BASED ON CONSUMER ENGAGEMENT IN DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT

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Received 04 March 2022; accepted 18 March 2022

Abstract. The aim of the research is to explore consumer perceptions of masculinity in advertising and determine the effectiveness of these advertising efforts in offering a brand's version of masculinity to men. The researchers analysed consumer comments on the YouTube platform and by applying Nvivo 11 qualitative data analysis software used qualitative content analysis, sentiment analysis, and discourse analysis to understand consumer perceptions of various brands' efforts in presenting their version of masculinity to consumers. The results showed that masculinity in advertising gets a lot of consumer attention and engagement while the product discourse does not get any noteworthy importance. In addition, the results indicated a correlation between likeability and consumer engagement and the importance of the main character and masculinity characteristics displayed in the advertisement for receiving positive consumer feedback.

Keywords: advertising, traditional masculinity, modern masculinity, marketing, branding, communication.

JEL Classification: M37, M31.

Introduction

As gender role portrayal has become an important issue in international advertising, researchers have become more and more interested in understanding how advertisers choose to depict masculinity in their communication to consumers. It is argued that men, as a cultural entity and a market force, are undergoing rapid change (Branchik & Chowdhury, 2012), due to a cultural shift taking place in Western society. In recent years, there has been a renewed interest in the topic of masculinity in advertising, due to Gillette's controversial ad aiming against toxic masculinity and promoting inclusivity.

Consumer perception of changing notions of masculinity is particularly important for marketing professionals because advertising is created based on assumptions about society (Daechun & Sanghoon, 2007), what does the society appreciate and want to have including material possessions and preferable version of themselves. Many researchers of advertising argue that masculinity is now branded (Scheibling & Lafrance, 2019) and men are increasingly marketed to and offered visions of masculinity for consumption, in other words, masculinity

has become a product (Zayer et al., 2020). However, it is unclear what consumers think about this product, that is masculinity, and what consumers think about various approaches that advertisers are using in order to sell their version of masculinity alongside the actual product. For the purpose of determining whether masculinity is being presented effectively to consumers, it is necessary to research consumer perceptions of masculinity and their approval of the current methods used by advertisers. Therefore, the research question is: What is the current consumer perception of masculinity in advertising and how should masculinity be depicted in advertising for it to resonate with consumers thus potentially increasing advertising effectiveness?

This research article consists of four parts. First, there is a literature review, with a summary of two major masculinity types and their effectiveness of being deployed in advertising in order to resonate with consumers. Then there is the Methods section with an explanation of how the research was carried out and reasoning for the qualitative content analysis, sentiment analysis, and discourse analysis methods. The third part shows the results of the

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research and finally, in the fourth part, there is a discussion of the results.

1. Literature review and theoretical framework

After conducting an extensive literature review, the authors concluded that researchers mainly distinguish two very different types of masculinity such as traditional masculinity, and modern or inclusive masculinity. Traditional masculinity is most commonly associated with physical strength (Pollack & Todd, 2017), bravery (Smith, 2012), patriotism and emotional stoicism (Ging, 2013), power and aggression (Oswald, 2007), wealth (Zayer et al., 2020), dominance, and a sense of entitlement (Connell, 2014), decisiveness and risk-seeking (Jaffe, 1990), athleticism (Zayer et al., 2020), and being a breadwinner, in other words providing for the family (Kimmel, 1996).

In contrast, modern masculinity is most commonly associated with progressive thinking (Ging, 2013), having an interest in culture (Oswald, 2007), being apologetic (Salzman et al., 2005), being emotionally expressive (Ging, 2019), open-minded (Kimmel, 1996), narcissism and immaturity (Coad, 2008), interest in fashion (Oswald, 2007), being sensitive and compassionate (Lalancette & Cormack, 2020), inclusiveness (Kimmel, 1996), and being brave enough to be whoever the man wants to be (Salzman et al., 2005).

There is a discussion of how traditional, and modern masculinity is effectively portrayed in brand communications with the consumers. For starters, the results of these efforts have a wide range of success, for instance, Orth and Holancova (2003) have found that consumers tend to approve more stereotypical role illustrations in advertising, which translates into a more positive ad and brand attitudes (De Meulenaer et al., 2018). Similarly, Putrevu (2004) concluded that men and women are likely to respond more positively to communication that is in tune with the traditional gender stereotypes. In addition, several other researchers concur, saying that, for instance, competitiveness, a muscular physique, and other symbols of traditional masculinity can be effective in advertising (Brownbill et al., 2018, p. 358). While, other studies have come up with opposite conclusions, namely that gender stereotyping results in negative ad and brand attitudes (Bellizzi & Milner, 1991; Jaffe & Berger, 1994). This can be explained by the fact that counter-stereotypical appeals are more surprising and could, therefore, provoke more positive feelings (Orth & Holancova, 2003). In addition, researchers have found that effective advertising nowadays should promote a paradigm shift when it comes to gender roles (Maga-raggia & Cherubini, 2017). Furthermore, it is noted that the use of stereotypes has come under increased scrutiny, due to the fact that gender roles in society are changing, thus marketers are in danger of alienating people by using traditional gender stereotypes (Hupfer 2002; De Meulenaer et al., 2018).

The characteristics of traditional and modern masculinity go hand in hand with two theoretical concepts that helped authors distinguish brand archetypes and masculinity archetypes in the advertisements selected for this research. Masculinity archetype theory (King, Lover, Magician, and Warrior) is developed by Carl Jung to classify masculinity archetypes and their key characteristics (Moore & Gillette, 1990). Similarly, brand archetype theory (Mark & Pearson, 2001), which includes twelve different archetypes with their distinctive characteristics and features helped authors notice the differences in selected advertisements' main features and their behaviours.

2. Methods

2.1. Criteria for assessing advertising effectiveness

Since this research is based on qualitative methods, the criteria for analysing advertising effectiveness were determined as consumer engagement, feedback, sentiment, and discourse instead of statistical criteria such as awareness in views, reach, or impressions.

A vital part of this research was analysing consumer engagement for the selected advertisements. The trade publication Advertising Age published the article "The Ad Age Is Over", where the experts of advertising heavily argued that now advertising has the future on the internet with consumer engagement. In the article, the experts emphasized that the way the world is heading is voluntary engagement (Quesenberry, 2018) explaining that advertisers are moving away from push marketing to more interactive consumer engagement marketing (Quesenberry, 2018). Therefore, this research mainly focused on consumer engagement.

Consumer engagement as an advertising effectiveness metric is quite relative (Graves, 2010) because the engagement can be positive or negative. In other words, some consumers can overwhelmingly criticize the advertisement while others can celebrate it and show support. Advertisers have considerably less influence over the messages that consumers read, hear, and watch about their brands (Quesenberry, 2018), therefore, it is the content of the consumer engagement that matters, which means that a researcher must conduct sentiment analysis. In advertising, sentiment is defined as the opinions expressed by followers (Levin, 2019). It is proclaimed that sentiment has a direct impact on how consumers will perceive the brand, which ultimately will determine sales. Sentiment shows how much the respondents, audience, consumers agree or disagree with the message of the ad, and how positively or negatively they speak about the content in question (Graves, 2010). Considering that masculinity is a construction that emerges in the meeting of a variety of discourses and ideologies (Knudsen & Andersen, 2020), it is crucial to discover what exactly these discourses are all about from a consumer perspective.

2.2. Data collection

Based on the literature review of possible methods used for the research, the authors decided to use online data collection by extracting YouTube comments as data. On YouTube consumers willingly give their opinions on specific ads where masculinity is at the centre of the advertisement, which can help the researcher to determine the success of this ad. The data collection was done using a YouTube comments downloader. Using YouTube comments as data also means that there has to be a large number of comments analysed with the interest of getting an insightful understanding of consumers' perception of masculinity in advertising. There were six advertisements in which YouTube comments were analysed in this research to determine consumers' perception of masculinity in advertising. The authors of this research decided to take a sample of 400 YouTube comments from each advertisement, making a total of 2400 comments. The reason for choosing YouTube comments is that it provides a certain level of authenticity (Tolson, 2010). It is argued that user-generated material on the Internet, particularly YouTube has its 'freshness' and 'spontaneity' that offers a new form of 'authenticity' in mediated communication, where users are more open and speak freely by posting text comments (Tolson, 2010). Many researchers argue for YouTube as the platform where to get an insightful idea about what consumers truly care about and appreciate. YouTube is a key site where the discourses of participatory culture and the emergence of the creative, empowered consumer have been played out (Benson, 2016). What is more, researchers argue for the academic value of using YouTube comments as data, saying that YouTube has attracted academic interest in emerging literature that tends to view YouTube as a technological, media, or cultural phenomenon (Jones et al., 2015).

2.3. The selected advertisements depicting masculinity

In order for the methods to be used appropriately, there was a need to select the right advertisements that will provide content to YouTube commentators to express their approval or disapproval of the advertising tactics when depicting masculinity. The authors selected six advertisements that heavily focus on masculinity in their efforts to get consumer attention. Three of them were ads depicting traditional masculinity and three were depicting modern masculinity. The criteria for selecting these advertisements were the following:

- (1) Focus on masculinity in the advertisement;
- (2) Large amount of YouTube comments (that provides material for qualitative content, sentiment, and discourse analysis);
- (3) Variety of products being advertised;
- (4) Timing of the advertisement (released in the last decade);
- (5) Variety of brand archetypes, masculinity archetypes, and brand personality dimensions.

The advertisements selected were from six different brands selling different products, such as shaving products, deodorants and shampoos, and beer, therefore, providing researchers with different audiences and their unique feedback about the advertisements.

The research was carried out in early 2021. Since then a few changes have occurred 1) YouTube changed its policy of displaying the number of dislikes; 2) Gillette has hidden the "The best man can be" comment section and National Football League has made the advertisement private.

2.4. Qualitative content analysis

Qualitative content analysis was conducted using Nvivo 11 qualitative data analysis software to help with the process of organizing, analysing, and finding relevant insights in the text. Researchers took a sample of 400 comments from each of the advertisement's YouTube comments (total of 2400 comments analysed). The authors chose to have a mixed content analysis of conventional and direct content analysis. That means that some codes were defined before the analysis of the data based on the theoretical framework and some codes were defined during the analysis of data making it a partially open and partially preconceived coding. Content analysis using a directed approach is guided by a more structured process than in a conventional approach (Hickey & Kipping, 1996), however, there was also the process of allowing new categories and codes to emerge from the data as a conventional content analysis with open coding. After the coding process was done with 198 different codes, the codes were sorted into larger categories based on how they are related and what they reveal. These larger categories were formed into themes that emerged from the YouTube comments. Some comments had more than just one theme which is why the percentage of combined themes displayed graphically has more than 100%.

3. Results

Due to the limited permitted length of the paper, the results of video content analysis, statistical analysis, and discourse analysis are discussed in the discussion part of this paper, however, the findings of each advertisement's qualitative content analysis are presented in the results chapter.

3.1. Barbasol's "Shave like a man" advertisement's YouTube comment section's qualitative content analysis (Barbasol, 2013)

The most common theme that emerged from "Shave like a man" YouTube comments was ad appreciation (Figure 1), where consumers expressed how much they appreciate the advertisement and provided some reasons for why that is. This theme was evident in 32% of the comments. Most often the reasons for approving the ad were not given, but other times the reasons were

associated with the humorous script and tone of the ad, which was evident in 13% of the comments. Some of the comments (6%) expressed interest in becoming a Barbasol customer, which indicated approval of the ad as well, therefore could be combined with the other 32% and the 13%, making a strong approval rate of 51%.

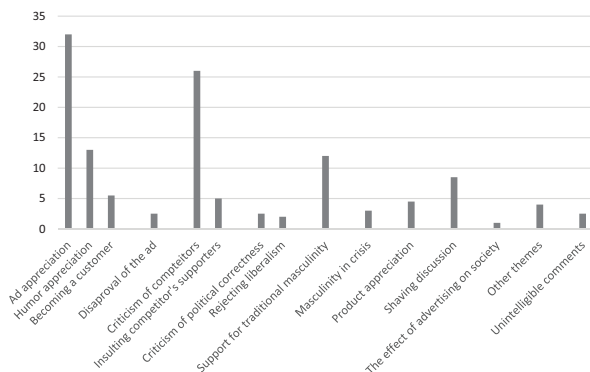


Figure 1. Themes from Barbasol's "Shave like a man" advertisement's comment section, in % (source: authors' original work)

Comments that were negative of the advertisement were only 3%, which is a remarkably good score for any ad to get, particularly on the internet. However, there were many negative comments directed to Barbasol's competitors and the customers and supporters of Barbasol's competitor, Gillette. Criticism of Gillette was evident in 26% of the comments and an additional 5% were directed towards Gillette's supporters. These themes were related to criticism of political correctness and rejecting liberalism, which got 3% and 2%, respectively. There was also rather a significant amount of debate over masculinity. For instance, 12% of the comments showed strong support for traditional masculinity. Therefore, these comments in a way could also be put together with the support of the ad itself. Furthermore, 3% of the comments were about the "crisis in masculinity" theme, where consumers argued that men are becoming soft and not "manly enough", however, that was mostly directed towards Gillette, not Barbasol, which, therefore, is mostly connected to the criticism of competitors. Finally, product appreciation was mentioned in 5% of the comments, and shaving discussion was evident in 9% of the comments, which was related to the product in question.

3.2. Old Spice's "The man your man could smell like" advertisement's YouTube comment section's qualitative content analysis (Old Spice, 2010)

The qualitative content analysis (Figure 2) revealed that the most common themes in the Old Spice advertisement's comment section were Ad appreciation with 31%. These comments were not providing the authors with many reasons why consumers appreciate the advertisement though, but they should be summed up with Appreciation of the humour theme (15%) and expressing the idea of becoming a customer (2%).

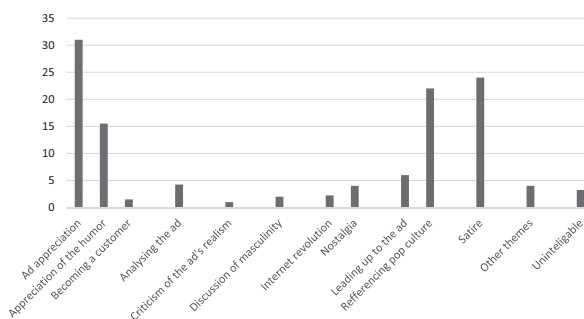


Figure 2. Themes from Old Spice "The man your man could smell like" advertisement's comment section, in % (source: authors' original work)

That makes the total comments that express consumers' appreciation of the advertisement to 48%, which is also a very good score for any advertisement to receive on the internet. Furthermore, the comment section did not show any signs of disapproval of the ad from consumers, which makes the results even more significant. The only criticism (1%) was questioned about how realistic nature of the advertisement, although it is fair to say that Old Spice was intentionally exaggerating the sequence of the advertisement. A significant amount of comments (24%) were categorized as satire. In these comments, the consumers were trying to extend the humour depicted in the ad with one of their own humorous ways how to make the advertisement even funnier. These comments also show an appreciation of the advertisement, specifically of the humour, in a more subtle way.

Referencing pop culture was evident in 22% of the comments, while discussion of masculinity was only evident in 2% of the comments. In comments about masculinity, consumers talked about the masculine characteristics of the main character.

3.3. Dos Equis' "The most interesting man alive" advertisement's YouTube comment section's qualitative content analysis (Dos Equis, 2016)

"The most interesting man alive" advertisement's YouTube comment section presented a variety of themes (Figure 3). The most common of them was satire, with 29% of the comments containing this theme. This is the theme where consumers were extending the humour presented in the

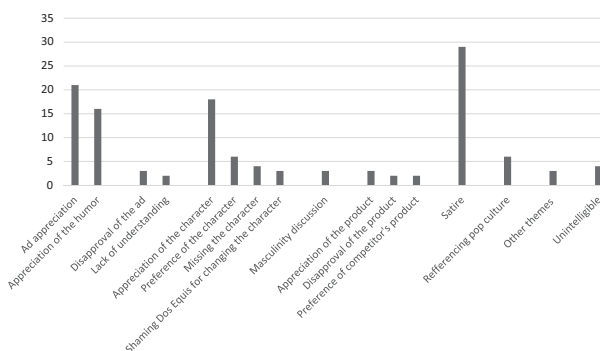


Figure 3. Themes from Dos Equis "The most interesting man alive" advertisement's comment section, in % (source: authors' original work)

advertisement with their own unique take on the main character and the traditional masculinity traits. Ad appreciation was found in 21% of the comments with an additional 16% of the comments where consumers were more specific in their praise for the ad and provided humour as the reason for the ad appreciation.

In addition, the authors argue that ad appreciation comments also consist of appreciation for the main character (18%) who is the central figure of the ad. If these statistics are summed up together then the total amount of comments that display consumers' support for the advertisement would be 55%, which is another surprising result of positivity and approval.

The advertisement received also some disapproval (3%) among the consumers, mainly about the rationality of the ad and the obvious sales pitch to consumers, while 2% of the comments showed consumers' lack of understanding of the advertisement. Finally, the consumers discussed the product (beer) and showed some support for it (3%), while some also argued for competitor beer brands (2%) and some plainly called Dos Equis product awful (2%).

3.4. Gillette's "We Believe: The Best Men Can Be" advertisement's YouTube comment section's qualitative content analysis (Gillette, 2019)

Gillette's "We Believe: The Best Men Can Be" advertisement's comment section presented the biggest variety of themes from all advertisements analysed (Figure 4). The comments were analysed in early 2021, but in the summer of 2021 comments have been disabled. With nearly half a million comments this advertisement helps answer the old question is there no such thing as bad publicity? The most common theme was disapproval of the ad (24%), where consumers expressed their distaste and sometimes even anger about the tactics of the advertisement. In addition, some consumers expressed much more than distaste for the advertisement: in 7% of the comments consumers called for the boycott of Gillette; while 2% were asking for an apology; 7% took great pleasure in Gillette's financial troubles as a consequence of this advertisement (at least how consumers saw it) and finally consumers promising never to purchase Gillette's and Procter and Gamble's products with 12% and 5% respectively. Furthermore, in some cases, the consumers provided reasons of why they disapproved the advertisement, for instance, in 6% of the comments consumers were arguing that this advertisement is demonizing men, and in 2% consumers saw Gillette's hypocrisy. According to consumers, the hypocritical behaviour of Gillette was having major flaws as a company but at the same time calling for social responsibility from consumers by taking a stance against toxic masculinity. When combined all these themes and their percentages together, it makes an astounding disapproval rate of 65%, which cannot even be compared with the score of other advertisements analysed in this research, which normally received a 3% or 5% disapproval rate. To make matters worse for Gillette, the theme of Ad appreciation was evident only in 4% of the comments. In these comments, consumers were

defending Gillette and this particular advertisement expressing their positive emotions towards it and expressing confusion of why others see it as demonizing men. "We Believe: The Best Men Can Be" comment section provided a lot of discussion about masculinity (9%), where consumers were debating and defending their stance of what it means to be a man. Not surprisingly, there was also a more specific debate happening in the comment section, particularly the theme of "Masculinity in crisis" (10%) where consumers were debating that men are losing their sense of masculinity. The combined percentage of masculinity being involved in the advertisement's comment section is 19% and therefore stands out as an important element for consumers.

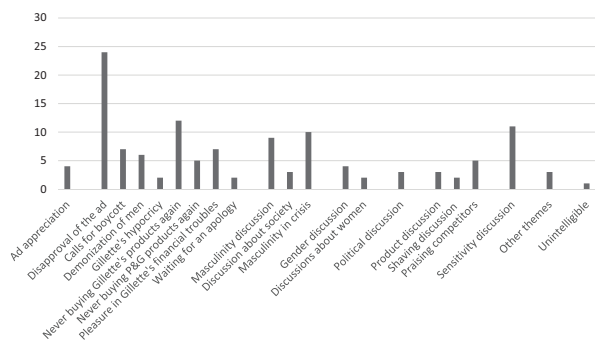


Figure 4. Themes from Gillette's "We Believe: The Best Men Can Be" advertisement's comment section, in % (source: authors' original work)

In addition, consumers were also debating masculinity's role in society (3%) and society in general, taking the debate even further and arguing about this concept from a broader perspective.

3.5. NFL's "Touchdown Celebrations to Come" advertisement's YouTube comment section's qualitative content analysis (National Football League, 2018, as cited in 2022)

The most common theme in the particular National Football League advertisement's comment section was ad appreciation, which was evident in 38% of the comments (Figure 5). As in other cases, ad appreciation was

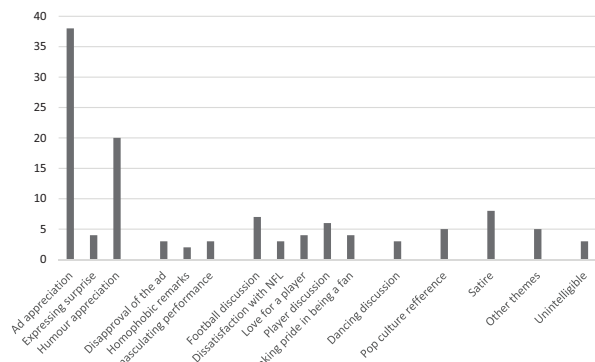


Figure 5. Themes from NFL's "Touchdown Celebrations to Come" advertisement's comment section, in % (source: authors' original work)

assigned to comments where consumers were vague and did not provide reasons why they appreciated the advertisement. However, an additional 20% were commenting with a theme of humour appreciation where consumers expressed their approval of the ad due to its humorous content. The comment section also revealed disapproval of the ad (3%) with an additional 2% of homophobic remarks, and 3% of consumers arguing that these footballers dancing is very emasculating, in other words not manly. Therefore, the entire masculinity discussion consisted of negative comments as a disapproval of the advertisement.

A sizeable part of the comment section was around football, which is the product of this advertisement after all. The generic football discussion was evident in 7% of the comments and player discussion was evident in 6% of the comments.

3.6. Axe’s “Is it ok for guys?” advertisement’s YouTube comment section’s qualitative content analysis (Axe, 2017)

The most common theme in the “Is it ok for guys?” comment section was Ad appreciation (41%), where consumers expressed their approval for the advertisement and provided some reasons for why they appreciate the ad (Figure 6). An additional 6% of comments showed consumers being positively surprised by the advertisement, which can be characterized as a desirable outcome for the advertiser. In contrast, the disapproval of the ad was evident in 13% of the comments, with an additional 4% of homophobic remarks, where consumers specifically expressed their negative view of the ad with a homophobic comment.

A major part of the “Is it ok for guys?” comment section was related to masculinity, even more than usual in the analysis of these advertisements. A general masculinity discussion was evident in 11% of the comments with additional disapproval for modern masculinity (4%) and disapproval of traditional masculinity (3%). In these comments, consumers were more specific in what they support or in this case, what they are against, rather than debating

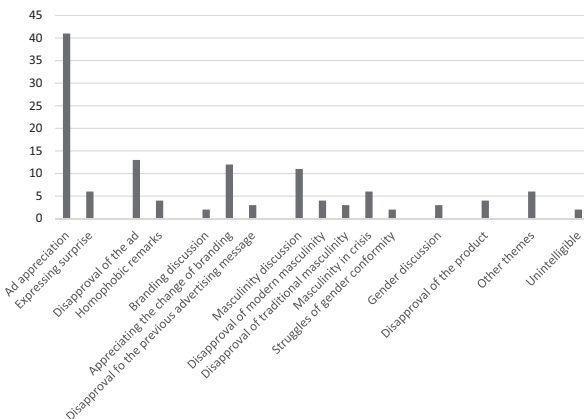


Figure 6. Themes from Axe’s “Is it ok for guys?” advertisement’s comment section, in % (source: authors’ original work)

the issue from a more general standpoint. What is more, the crisis in masculinity was evident in 6% of the comments, and struggles of gender conformity were found in 2%, making the entire masculinity debate evident in 26% of the comments.

The mentioning of the product itself was found very rarely in the comment section, as is the case with all these advertisements analysed where masculinity is the central issue. For this particular advertisement of Axe, the mentioning of the product was found in just 4% of the comments and all of it was expressing either stronger or weaker disapproval of the product.

3.7. Results from sentiment analysis

The sentiment analysis measuring likeability or how positive, negative or neutral were each advertisement’s comment section showed that of the selected ads traditional masculinity’s advertisements’ comment sections were on average more positive than modern masculinity’s, with a 56% positivity rate to 46% positivity rate (Figure 7).

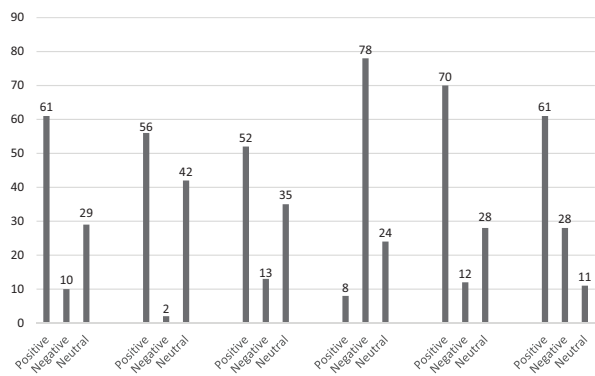


Figure 7. Sentiment analysis results of selected advertisements (source: authors’ original work)

However, that might be due to the significant discrepancy between Gillette’s positivity rate and NFL’s and Axe’s. For instance, only 8% of Gillette’s “The best man can be” comments were positive, with 78% being negative. While on the other hand the rest of the comment sections, especially NFL’s “Touchdown celebrations” (70% positivity rate) had a high level of positivity rate, despite what people mostly associate internet comment sections with. Due to Gillette’s “The best man can be” advertisement’s high negativity rate, the average negativity rate of the selected modern masculinity ads (39%) is notably higher than the negativity rate of traditional masculinity ads (8%).

When it comes to the neutrality of comments, suggesting consumers’ lack of emotional involvement, the traditional masculinity ads had much higher neutrality (35%) in their comments than modern masculinity ads (21%). This indicates that consumers are more emotionally expressive and opinionated when viewing modern masculinity content than traditional.

4. Discussion

As discussed in the Introduction part, prior studies have noted the importance of masculinity in advertising in order to capture consumer attention. However, previous studies evaluating masculinity in advertising observed inconsistent results on whether consumers appreciate more modern or more traditional depictions of masculinity. In other words, is it the masculine stereotypes or inclusiveness in advertising that is getting positive feedback from the consumers indicating advertising effectiveness? There are many individual differences (e.g., attitudes, personality, values, motivations) that affect consumers in the decision-making process (Lee & Workman, 2020) one of them clearly is consumer perception of masculinity and advertisers' depiction of it.

The results of this study further support the idea of researching masculinity, both, the traditional and modern forms in the context of advertising. This study examined which parameters to look for and analyse for the purpose of assessing advertising effectiveness and then set out to harvest data that would indicate consumer engagement and consumer feedback expressed in their attitudes and opinions. The video content analysis proved that while traditional masculinity ads mostly emphasized strong, powerful, stoic, and emotionless brand archetypes as Ruler, Hero, and Outlaw (Mark & Pearson, 2001), modern masculinity ads emphasized Caregiver, Everyman, Jester, and Innocent, which are brand archetypes associated with empathy, sensitivity, care, and sense of equality. In addition, video content analysis also featured a focus on brand personality dimensions (Aaker, 1997), and results indicated that brand strategists who focus on traditional masculinity in their advertising and brand strategists who focus on modern masculinity in their advertising focus on almost entirely opposite brand personalities. While the research was focused on qualitative methods, there was also a brief focus on a few statistical elements determining the effectiveness of the selected advertisements from a quantitative perspective. The brief statistical analysis of this research showed that of the six advertisements selected the highest level of consumer engagement by far was Gillette's "The best man can be" advertisement with only 72 views per every comment posted (indicating very high consumer engagement). However, Gillette is proof that there is such a thing as bad publicity because the Likeability ratio (Likes/Dislikes) showed that people did not like Gillette's advertisement and the analysis of consumer engagement showed that the discourse in Gillette's comment section was definitely not positive. For instance, the Likeability ratio for Gillette's ad was only 0.5 which means that the ad received twice as many dislikes as likes. This result is especially poor by comparing it with other advertisements like Barbasol's "Shave like a man" Likeability ratio of 133, meaning that the advertisement received 133 times more likes than dislikes. The level of likeability and positivity was also evident in the sentiment analysis, confirming the findings of statistical analysis. An important discovery

was that the advertisements with the highest and lowest likeability (Gillette and Barbasol) were the ones with the highest consumer engagement by a wide margin.

The statistical analysis examining the timing of the brand awareness on YouTube (using Google Trends) showed the significance for three of the six advertisements for the brands, indicating that in half of the cases masculinity could get a major popularity boost for the brand.

The qualitative content analysis showed various themes emerging from the YouTube comment sections. Many were related to the appreciation of the advertisement in general, and some provided specific reasons for that such as the main character, the concept of masculinity, humour, the stance against political correctness, and other themes indicating consumer appreciation and, thus, advertising effectiveness. However, the qualitative content analysis also showed that in some cases while the consumer engagement might be large, the content of that engagement is often not about the brand or the advertisement, but about satire and references to popular culture or other themes that are not so relevant for the advertisers. On one hand, these results indicate consumers' interest in humorous content, which is not significant for masculinity, but on the other hand, it shows that joking about masculinity is something that consumers feel interested in and want to be engaged in. Masculinity as a separate theme was evident in a rather small amount of comments, but it was often evident in other themes, for example, when discussing the main character of the advertisement signalling appreciation for the character and thus the advertisement as a whole.

Similarly, with qualitative content analysis, discourse analysis also provided authors with valuable insights into what consumers think about the advertisements in question and their versions of masculinity depicted in both, modern and traditional ways. The masculinity discourse was more evident in Axe's and Barbasol's advertisements. In the case of Barbasol, the discourse analysis revealed how much consumers liked this advertisement and expressed their opposition to Barbasol's competitor Gillette and their advertisement against toxic masculinity. Gillette's comment section had a very negative discourse with consumers showing their distaste for the advertisement and calling for a boycott of the brand. Dos Equis advertisement's discourse analysis of the YouTube comment section revealed a significant debate about the main character of the ad displaying traditional masculinity. Consumers expressed their appreciation for the original character and distaste for the new, who is not displaying so much traditional masculinity as the original character, also signalling consumer preferences on the matter. Discourse analysis showed that consumers perceive the advertisement in a larger context of masculinity that is influenced by the society, media, and other competitors of the brand as well as indicating the importance of the main character and his masculinity characteristics in an advertisement.

The sentiment analysis showed unexpected findings, largely due to how positive was the feedback of these

advertisements. Particularly considering that the environment where the data was collected was the internet, which usually is associated with an extremely negative place where consumers are harsh in their feedback. However, besides the notable exception of Gillette, consumers showed positive discourse and mostly appreciation of these advertisements, where masculinity was one of the key elements in the ads selected.

Conclusions

This study aimed to understand the current consumer perceptions of modern and traditional masculinity in advertising and how should advertisers depict masculinity in an effective way so it can resonate with consumers. This study, based on scientific literature, has identified certain parameters that determine advertising effectiveness such as awareness, consumer engagement, and consumer feedback, and based on the research developed certain criteria. The contribution of this study has been to confirm the characteristics that are typically associated with traditional and modern masculinity in the scientific literature, making it easier to identify for further research.

The following conclusions can be drawn from the present study:

- (1) When commenting on the advertisements consumers take into consideration the entire context of masculinity and the contemporary notions of it in society, media, popular culture, and competitor's advertisements.
- (2) Masculinity in advertising has such a significant interest for the consumers, that the product discourse does not get any noteworthy importance, suggesting that consumers might be too distracted on the main character and depiction of masculinity to pay attention to the product.
- (3) When presenting traditional masculinity in advertising, the main character is notably important as evident by the qualitative content and discourse analyses.
- (4) Traditional masculinity in advertising is rooted in somewhat old-fashioned stereotypes about men and masculinity that perpetuates the idea of gender conformity.
- (5) Modern masculinity in advertising is rooted in equality, inclusiveness, opposition to gender conformity, and masculine stereotypes.
- (6) In order for the advertisement depicting traditional masculinity not to receive backlash and controversial responses from the consumers about promoting stereotypical thinking, the advertisers should present traditional masculinity with humour even exaggerating the notions of masculinity.
- (7) Contrary to a popular belief the discourse in internet comments concerning masculinity is positive rather than negative.
- (8) Likeability of the advertisement is linked with consumer engagement. The advertisements that had the highest and lowest like/dislike ratio had also the highest consumer engagement.
- (9) If done right, an advertisement can become a popular cultural phenomenon, with consumers referencing the advertisement and praising it a decade later.

This study lays the groundwork for further research analysing the effectiveness of using masculinity in branding and advertising.

Further research will expand the methods for assessing consumer perceptions of masculinity in advertising by conducting surveys and focus groups as well as interviews with the experts of the advertising industry.

Disclosure statement

The authors of this research declare that they do not have any competing financial, professional, or personal interests from other parties.

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